



Submerged Resources Center/John Brooks

**National park coral resources**, including these at Dry Tortugas National Park, Florida, received a conservation boost from Executive Order 13089, which calls for greater understanding of coral reefs through mapping, inventories, and research. It also mandates greater reef protection. As a result, the National Park Service requested and received \$1.6 million in FY 2000, which it distributed among nine coral reef parks to add personnel in inventory and monitoring, mapping, and protection positions.

## Oceans, coastlines, coral reefs, and national parks

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I am very pleased to contribute to this year's *Natural Resource Year in Review* both because of my recent appointment to the National Park System Advisory Board and because of the increased level of attention our nation's marine resources are now receiving. Nineteen ninety-nine was a landmark year concerning public understanding and acknowledgment of the need to better protect and manage our marine resources and the need for more and better protected marine parks and reserves.

Growing out of the National Oceans Conference held in Monterey, California, in June 1998, a coordinated, disciplined, long-term federal oceans policy was completed in 1999 that will guide federal efforts in addressing the many challenges we face in ensuring that all ocean resources are protected and sustained. The U.S. Coral Reef Task Force, created by Executive Order 13089, also made much progress toward reviewing and organizing future federal actions addressing our understanding and protection of coral reefs. The President's executive order calls for greater understanding of coral reefs through mapping, inventories, and research; it also calls for greater protection. This must mean, among other things, closure of reefs to fishing—both recreational and commercial. The loss of long-lived predators from reefs has great implications for the long-term preservation of coral reefs. The task force completed a *National Action Plan to Conserve Coral Reefs* that calls for the protection of at least 20% of all coral reefs and their associated habitat types in "no-take" ecological reserves by 2010. However, we will only be able to protect our marine environments if we understand them. If decisions are made to close areas to fishing, we must reach them using a well-developed research and monitoring framework so that the effects of closures can be clearly understood and constantly evaluated.

As the premier federal agency for natural and cultural resource protection and preservation, the National Park Service should take a leading role in the establishment and management of marine protected areas. Many of our nation's most significant marine and coastal resources have been placed under the stewardship of the National Park Service, and these resources need to receive the same level of attention, nurturing, care, and protection as do their terrestrial counterparts. Our natural and cultural marine resource heritage should be viewed as no less important.

What will our oceans, coastlines, coral reefs, and national marine parks be like in 2020? What do we want them to be? What must we do now to make sure we get there? What kind of national park system will best represent the nation's wonderful natural heritage and meet the needs of its citizens? Should we not make sure that the hydrosphere is better represented?

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Will there be a day when the deep ocean is accessible to national park visitors? Do some of our early, experimental underwater laboratories deserve recognition as important cultural or historic sites worthy of preservation, visitation, and interpretation? What about better representation of the diversity of coral reefs in our national park system? And is it not time for better protection of the reefs already in our care?

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to serve on the National Park System Advisory Board so that I can ask these very questions. I am excited and optimistic about a greater representation of important marine habitats as future units of national parks and seashores. I am equally certain that there must be a greater emphasis in the National Park Service on its role in preserving marine areas in the future. History will record that Executive Order 13089 recognized these needs and will judge us on how well we responded.

